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ABSTRACT

Many schools expect teachers to act as curriculum clerks, carrying out decisions about subject matter and classroom management. A promising new metaphor for professional educators is that of teacher as explorer, the leader of an expedition into unfamiliar territory. The image of explorer changes the perspective on teaching goals and roles and frees instructors to consider new alternatives and traditions which promote exciting practices in the classroom. A classroom illustration demonstrates the theoretical underpinnings and practical possibilities of the "explorer" metaphor. In this classroom students first wrote with a partner about a main character in "Dear Mr. Henshaw" to describe what they thought she was like and to jot down questions they had about her. Following that activity, students reflected independently on the written conversation process, noting what they had learned, questions they still had, and general reactions to the experience. By validating and extending student responses, the teacher can increase their sophistication with language and literature, and make the journey into literature an exploration of life itself. (Ten figures are included; 26 references are attached.) (PRA)

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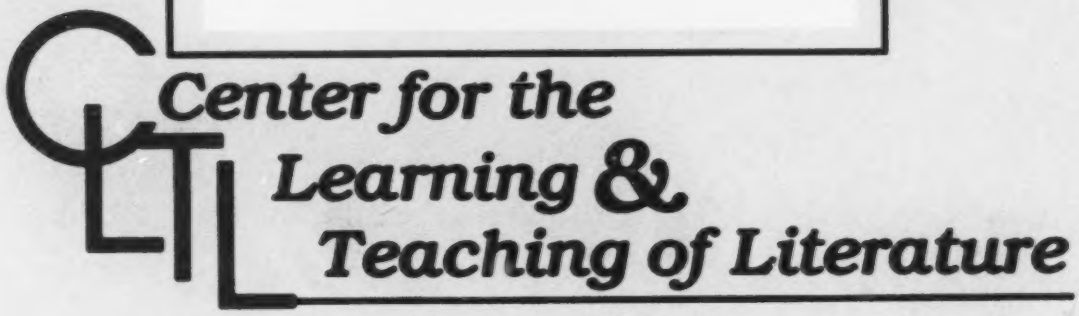
Teaching Literature: From Clerk to Explorer

Jayne DeLawter



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Teaching Literature: From Clerk to Explorer

Jayne DeLawter
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> I was surprised at how long they kept going on the dialogue; they just kept writing to each other. In reading their conversations and reflection notes, I learned that some kids were really making personal connections with literature; others just touched on it here and there. The ones who seemed to make those connections were kids who had difficult things going on in their lives. The literature was really speaking to them.
>
> Doing the written conversation, especially, convinced me to go ahead with the character interpretation. I probably would have stopped with that if I hadn't seen their response to those two experiences. It was sort of like sitting on this gold mine and thinking, 'Where do we go from here?'
>
> At this point, I'm still learning about these strategies. I still don't know all the possibilities. I'm finding out - still exploring. If I tried to limit things at this point, I'd be losing something. I'm really eager to try both of them again because, you know, you always find out something, something different when you do it. Both of the experiences turned out so much better than I'd imagined they would. I want to find out what can be done.

The quotation above captures the excitement and commitment of a teacher who regularly leads her students in explorations of literary texts. The teacher's concerns contrast sharply with current practices and beliefs about teaching and prompt the question: what are appropriate metaphors for teaching literature?

The prevalent metaphors for education tend to be atheoretical composites borrowed from industry, medicine, business, the military and computer science, and have been attacked as being both inappropriate and constraining to professional educators (Smith, 1988). Acting on the beliefs implied by such metaphors, many schools expect teachers to act as curriculum clerks, carrying out decisions about subject matter and classroom management. Management "systems" require teachers to follow prescribed procedures and maintain lists and records of student scores; in this role, teachers become clerks. Rarely are they encouraged to express their own professional voices or to implement their own views of teaching and learning. Nowhere is this lack of voice more obvious than in the teaching of literature.

A promising new metaphor for professional educators is that of teacher as explorer, the leader of an expedition into unfamiliar territory. The image of explorer changes our perspective on teaching goals and roles and frees us to consider new alternatives and traditions which promote exciting practices in the classroom.

Theoretical Underpinnings for a Fresh Metaphor

Language Is a Social Transaction and a Personal Construction

Human language grows from personal needs to communicate, to imagine, and to reflect. It begins in social settings as young children learn the symbol systems that surround and bring them control and satisfaction. Language - both oral and visual - is reciprocal; users are active participants in constructing and negotiating meanings and in discovering and inventing forms and symbols. Language varies according to the social situation in which it occurs, the linguistic and conceptual history of its users, and the purposes to which it is put. Written language is a primary language process, not simply a secondary representation of speech. As such, both writing and reading are ways of making meaning. Both use visual symbols to construct and reconstruct meanings, to share ideas and feelings, to shape the world.

The view of reading as a psycholinguistic process (Goodman, 1968, 1984) and the notion of reading as a transaction (Rosenblatt, 1938, 1978) constitute a strong foundation for teaching literature. Rosenblatt's first book, Literature as Exploration (1938), inspired the metaphor for teacher as explorer. Both Goodman and Rosenblatt view the reader as actively participating in an experience with language where the reader's contribution is as important as what is presented in the text. The quality and richness of the reading experience is determined by the meanings evoked by the reader in transaction with the text. Since readers bring different life histories and purposes to texts, and because each reading of a text takes place in a specific situation, every reading necessarily produces newly constructed meanings. Different readers can never be expected to "get" precisely the same meaning from a text because they bring different experiences to it (Goodman, 1984, p. 827). In each transaction, the reader produces a "poem" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 12), a "unique" reading (Rosenblatt, 1988).

Rosenblatt (1978) further asserts that readers assume a stance as they read. They read either with attention to what they can take away *after* they have completed the reading (efferent reading) or with attention to the experience they are having *while* they are reading (aesthetic reading). In either case, the meanings constructed in the transaction are substantially determined by a reader's stance. In efferent reading, the text is scrutinized for specifically useful information. The reader searches for and organizes textual and memory cues to arrive at right answers - the transaction is driven by the reader's need to do something with what is read. By contrast, an aesthetic stance enables a literary reading, one that emphasizes the reader's intuitive and emotional response to a text. Feelings and personal evocations experienced *during* the reading are valued. Group dialogue and critique extend individual responses. The aesthetic potential of literature is rarely experienced by readers who anticipate questions when they finish reading. Creating a social environment that fosters aesthetic transactions with texts is the basis for exploring literature. (See Langer, 1989 for a related view.)

Literature Is Experience with Artful Language and Powerful Ideas.

If readers must assume an aesthetic stance in order to realize a "lived-through" experience (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 32), the texts they read must allow or encourage this stance. Literary writers must be viewed as artists whose medium is language. "The quality of the writer's idea, the soundness of the structure he builds, and *the expressive power of his language*

[emphasis added] ... determines literary quality (Smith, 1953, p. 36). Unlike everyday language designed to convey facts or persuade to action, literary language is crafted to generate emotion, to engage the soul as well as the mind, to foster participation in the text world. According to Smith, "The thing that makes a book a good book to a child is that it is an experience" (p. 13).

The distinction between artful language and other language (e.g. business, classroom, political) appears to be intuitive. This "spirit of literature is felt in the kind of response it arouses in the mind and heart of the reader ... it is implicit rather than defined" (Smith, 1953, p. 189). Texts which capture this spirit of literature might be called artful; they promote and encourage aesthetic reading. In Books, Children and Men, Hazard (1960) asserts that writing which "remains faithful to the very essence of art [is that which offers] an intuitive and direct way of knowledge, a simple beauty capable of being perceived immediately (p. 42). Sayers (1965) amplifies this idea, suggesting that "only by *art* are the emotions touched, revived and educated and only art intuitively knows how to speak to children" (p. 114).

The aesthetic experience of a text, as satisfying as it may be, is not necessarily an end in itself; it can be extended and enhanced by subsequent experiences. Rosenblatt (1938) suggests that readers may need help in handling their responses to literature. The classroom needs to be "a place for critical sharing of personal responses" (pp. 285-286). Students should be offered the opportunity to talk with others who constructed different meanings from the same text, to engage in experiences which cause them to revisit the text, to flesh out and reexamine their initial reactions, to reflect on their own and others' responses, and to place the work in larger contexts. (Nelms, 1988, pp. 6-8) The need for readers to go beyond their initial evocations leads teachers to use language to expand language.

Language Generates Language.

The use of language invites more language. Examples are endless. A book or newspaper invites reading ... a speaker prepares for a talk by writing ... listeners scribble notes or wait to chat with friends about what they have heard ... a telephone conversation produces a to-do list of written reminders ... a young child notices environmental print and asks "What's that say?" ... siblings overhear parents talking and later replicate the conversation in their imaginative play...commuters read best sellers and tell companions about favorite parts...a first-grader hears a predictable refrain and joins in the next time it is repeated...a chef reads a new recipe and jots down key ingredients. In each of these cases, one language event prompted another. Movement among language modes was authentic and functional, arising naturally from the situation and appropriately to the intention of the language user. The character of the language was personal as well as social; it made sense in the situation.

The generativity of language can be exploited in teaching literature. Any language mode can lead easily to another: reading can lead to writing, talking to reading, listening to reading, writing to speaking. Language need not be carefully sequenced or managed; indeed, authentic language cannot be. Language play is by definition exploratory. As students try out new ways of using language, they will use the forms and varieties appropriate to the purposes and constraints of a situation. (Lindfors, 1987)

Using one language mode strengthens and facilitates subsequent language use in all modes. Harste, Woodward and Burke (1984, p. 211) suggest that a common language process

underlies all linguistic events. When children read, they learn conventions of writing. When children speak, they develop language patterns which may be used in writing. When students write, they learn how readers use written language cues to construct meaning. Activities involving uninterrupted, purposeful language provide students with opportunities to grow in all language modes. By contrast, isolated skill exercises separate language processes and deprive students of the situational and psycholinguistic supports needed to learn language effectively; the disembodied bits of language confuse students as they seek to make sense of their instruction.

Literature teachers can create and draw upon situations in which transaction with literature easily and naturally prompts other authentic uses of language. This involves a careful selection of texts for shared reading as well as a wide assortment for student browsing and independent choice. It also requires a conscious arrangement of the classroom environment to encourage private and social events with texts. Teachers can set the stage for students to read, talk and write about their reading, but they cannot precisely predict their students' transactions with texts or interactions with others. Diverse personal and idiosyncratic responses are anticipated and encouraged. Knowing the generative potential of all language experience, teachers document, celebrate, and extend lived-through evocations of literary texts.

The Prevalent View: Teacher as Curriculum Clerk

In response to recent educational reform mandates and to trends in the field of literacy instruction, many teachers are attempting to integrate literature into their curricula. They most often start with the teaching of reading. These well-intentioned teachers typically begin by substituting trade books for stories from the basal readers, but their teaching methods reflect recommendations in teacher's guides which accompany each basal series and techniques learned through socialization into teaching. The teachers introduce "new vocabulary words" - words they believe will be difficult for their students - prior to the children's reading these words in the context of the story. They read aloud to small groups to guarantee that the children don't miss any of the words in the story. They conscientiously devise "comprehension questions" for children to answer after each section of the book in order to check for understanding. They seek units or kits for individual titles that have been commercially published or developed by a school district to ensure that their students get enough practice on word analysis skills, dictionary skills, and other conventional components of reading programs. They (and their administrators) look to standardized test results to determine whether or not the use of literature is succeeding in making their students "readers". These teachers are eager to do well by their students; they want to keep up with the profession without "throwing out the baby" (McCallum, 1988). Although some believe that the focus on literature is simply another pendulum swing that will eventually fade into another fad, they welcome new ideas that will make their teaching more effective.

Most of these teachers are implementing effectively what the profession and the public have come to accept as reading instruction. The teachers reflect the prevailing culture of the reading establishment for the past twenty-five years in their understanding of reading as a set of skills. From this perspective, fluent reading results from mastery of specific skills which must be taught sequentially using controlled materials. Success in reading is equated with high standardized test scores. The substitution of trade books for basal stories seems to answer adequately the reform mandates for teaching literature, although some teachers express concern

about how the skills will be "covered" without the use of hierarchical materials. They do not realize that research and theory support a view of reading which is not skills-based, but rather meaning-centered.

Further, these teachers rarely differentiate between teaching reading through literature, teaching reading along with literature, and teaching literature itself. And yet, most of them are missing the key to effective instruction of literature and, for that matter, reading. As Freeman (1988) asserts, teachers have used basal reading packages for so long that many of them have "lost confidence in themselves as professionals able to help children make choices about what they read and write" (p. 242). They have become classroom managers in their attempt to be accountable for skill development. They have accepted a metaphor which reduces teaching to assigning and assessing; they have taken on the role of curriculum clerk.

What is the problem with this metaphor for teaching literature? Aren't these methods acceptable as first steps in the transition from skills-based programs to literature-based ones? Maybe. Maybe not.

The Basalization of Literature Teaching

A major problem with the teacher as clerk metaphor and the practices it entails (described above) is that literature teaching becomes "basalized" (Goodman, 1988). Although students in elementary classrooms may be introduced to trade books as a part of their instructional program, the selections are used in much the same way as the stories from the basal series had been. Literature becomes the fashionable "reading material." The potential literary experience for the students disappears as literature is treated as a vehicle for teaching skills rather than as an opportunity to experience literature as a unique journey into the worlds of text.

When instructional materials are designed to ensure introduction and practice of isolated skills, the consequence of reading a story is changed from exploring the ideas triggered by the story to completing training exercises on those skills. Consider an activity book developed to accompany Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry (Taylor, 1976), a children's novel set in a southern community in the 1930s. This workbook, Reading Skills through Literature: Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry (Tillman, 1985), presents a set of lessons related to chapters in the novel. Although the author asserts that "activities have been designed to encourage the student to read the original text" (p. 1), the worksheets clearly illustrate a view of reading as skill mastery.

The first exercise, "Changing Short Vowels" (p. 7), presents information from Chapter 1. It requires students to change the vowel in words which follow each sentence and then to fill in the sentence blank with the newly formed word:

1. Little Man wore shiny _____ shoes. *block*
2. When Grandpa bought the land, most of it was _____ forest. *stall*
11. Miss Crocker had _____ yet talked to Mama. *nut*
14. Books were piled high on the teacher's _____. *dusk*

A later lesson, "Discovering Meaning Through Context" (p. 27), associated with Chapter 6, asks children to use the sentence context to figure out which of three word meanings is the correct meaning for an italicized word.

1. Big Ma did not answer, but nodded her head *mutely*.

   silently slowly quickly

5. Slaves were taught to obey because their owners feared they would *revolt*.

   rebel listen recover

The last lesson in the workbook, "Explaining Feelings" (pp. 51-52), requires students to describe the feelings they had as they read the book. They are directed to "write your response on the lines provided" and to "be sure to use complete sentences."

1. How did you feel when Cassie saw the car headlights coming toward her house?
2. How did you feel when Mr. Barnett refused to wait on the children at the store?
3. How did you feel when Big Ma made Cassie apologize to Lillian Jean?

Activities such as these define clearly the underlying goals - use of "a classic title in children's literature to teach reading skills" (Tillman, 1985). Such worksheets ignore the readers' literary experience. Instead, they focus on small bits of textual material, right answers, and rigid response formats. Children who are asked to do such assignments on a regular basis come to assume that the purpose of reading literature (from the teacher's perspective) is to learn to produce acceptable answers in the workbook. Discussions of right answers to the assignments simply emphasize the importance of the prescribed task. The answer key becomes the authority on literature. In the context of such activities, discussion of the story itself - the impact of the events on the student readers, their notions about the characters, why they think the author wrote the story - too often becomes peripheral.

The use of stories to teach reading skills often leads to another compromise in the teaching of literature - mutilated texts. Literary selections are often abridged or rewritten when they are chosen for instructional purposes. (Goodman, Shannon, Freeman, & Murphey, 1988) Publishers of anthologies at all levels adapt texts. They attempt to satisfy grade-level expectations and special interest group challenges. They change specific words in order to meet traditional readability requirements or to satisfy demands of vocabulary control. Whole sentences may be altered to "simplify" language structures, and entire sections may be omitted to conform to space constraints; even illustrations are modified or eliminated to reduce costs or to meet other market pressures. All of these changes affect the author/reader transaction. Reading an altered work is not reading the author's work.

Finally, the basalization of literature contributes to the image and practice of teacher as curriculum clerk. Packaged as vehicles for skill development, literature programs supply questions and other assignments for students as well as patterned and scripted instructional sequences for teachers. These extensive guides embody a prescribed scope and sequence of activities. Although the guide may suggest open-ended projects and reading of trade books as enrichment or extension activities, the series' tests and other support materials are designed to assess and promote skill acquisition.

In these programs, teachers find little help in developing text-specific teaching strategies that boost student strengths and keep reading and writing processes functional and whole. Discussions of alternative strategies that focus on strengths of second-language learners and other children who are traditionally at risk are rare. Rather, new literature-based programs continue to provide "teacher proof" lessons that can be followed with minimal preparation. They reinforce the notion that reading (and literature) can be taught through careful adherence to a series of lessons and assessed by checking off isolated skills as they are mastered. Although the use of literary texts may provide more interesting and well-written stories for students, the recommended pattern of instruction remains conventional and teacher-centered in most prepackaged literature units.

Beyond Basalized Teaching

With occasional exceptions, teachers who view reading not as skill acquisition but as constructing meaning with written language find that they cannot use such materials productively. Often identified as whole language teachers, they want to plan a more personal literature curricula based on what they know about the specific group of children they are teaching and how they learn. They want to use instructional strategies that suit the particular piece of literature. They treat literature as a new world to explore and believe they can enter with their students into the author's world - each bringing her or his personal strengths, interests, and intentions on the journey.

As exploration leaders, these teachers acknowledge their professional responsibility to teach reading comprehension, and also respect the author's work and their students' minds. They are willing to lead an expedition, in full knowledge that they cannot - and should not - try to control all the potential experiences. They expect to build on students' responses to the text as well as their own, and to adapt their teaching strategies to promote reading, rereading and shared discussion by all their students. They know from experience that skill-based work sheets, mutilated texts and prescriptive teacher's guides inhibit their teaching and diminish the literary experience for their students. Their goal is to entice, excite, include, and involve students in the study of literature through authentic language experiences in the classroom, thus leading students into the many worlds of literature.

An Example from the Classroom

A classroom illustration demonstrates the theoretical underpinnings and practical possibilities of the explorer metaphor. The social and personal nature of written language use - both reading and writing, the significance of literary evocation, and the generative nature of language: all are apparent in the work of 29 fourth-graders in a suburban, ethnically diverse elementary school classroom in California. The class was entering its third week of literature study on Dear Mr. Henshaw (Cleary, 1983). The book had been read in its entirety, and the children had participated in a variety of oral and written experiences to extend their initial evocations.

Ms. Dakin, the teacher, designed a morning session to highlight the character of the recently divorced mother of Leigh Botts, the twelve-year-old protagonist. She chose two

primary strategies for that day: written conversation (Harste, Short & Burke, 1988, pp. 375-379; King, 1983) and reflection notes. First, students were to write with a partner about Mrs. Botts - to describe what they thought she was like and to jot down questions they had about her. Following that activity, students were to reflect independently on the written conversation process, noting what they had learned, questions they still had, and general reactions to the experience. In the following section, student responses to these two experiences are analyzed.

Written Conversation

Written conversation provides an informal communication experience in which partners write and read each others' messages. Like oral conversations, each dialogue has a life of its own, prompted by the interests and intentions of its participants. Students often engage in spontaneous written conversations as they pass notes about personal concerns; this activity builds on their natural desire to respond and comment on shared experiences.

Matthew and Russell focused their written conversation on characteristics of Mrs. Botts and on her relationship with Leigh (see Figure 1A). They asked each other questions, stated opinions, and noted their areas of agreement and disagreement. They also negotiated a way to conduct the conversation. In his second turn, Matthew suggested a format for Russell's next comment. Later on Russell expressed some frustration with Matthew's apparent interrogation. Both boys were fully engaged during the half-hour exchange. While one wrote, the other sat quietly with pencil in hand, looking thoughtfully into space or around the room at other partner groups. Their reflection notes revealed both boys' enthusiasm about the written conversation process (see Figure 1B).

All Ms. Dakin's students were active in exchanges with their self-selected partners. No one was excluded; students who traditionally might be isolated for special reading and writing instruction because of low test scores or because their family language was not English participated fully. The personal nature of reading transactions was evident in the students' written visions of Leigh's mother, in the diversity of their written conversations, and in the range of content and emotional tone of their exchanges. For example, while Matthew and Russell stuck to story specifics about the day at the beach and the TV controversy, students Lisa and Maidie's exchange shows quite a different focus: the issue of divorce (see Figure 2).

Lisa immediately personalized the conversation by revealing her own parents' divorce. Maidie sensitively affirmed Lisa's feelings by relating them to the story as well as to her own family situation. This explicit identification with the story continued as Lisa expressed concern that the personality change she and Maidie noticed in Mrs. Botts wouldn't happen with her own mother. Within the context of their personal experiences with divorce, Lisa and Maidie's written conversation focused on Leigh's mother's character evolution. They frequently referred to the text ("at the beginning," "but then she changed," "I'm glad the story finally got her in the picture," "in the ending part"), but they did not address specific story events as did Matthew and Russell.

The contrast between these two pairs of partners highlights the diversity of responses that teachers can expect and encourage when literature engages readers in a lived-through experience. Both conversations presented Ms. Dakin with opportunities for expansion through subsequent classroom activities.

Russell [redacted]
Matthew [redacted]
October 3, 1988

M.F: I think the mother is kind of selfish because she won't get the T.V ~~fixed~~ fixed

R.W: I think you are right in some ways but on the other hand Leigh might not want to tell about some of the good things about her like smooching.

M.F: What do you think Mrs. Batt's felt when Leigh got the coat he always wanted? Skip a line and answer!

R.W: I think ~~Leigh's~~ Leigh's mom felt glad that Leigh had finally got something that he had been wanting.

M.F: I think so to! But what about when his mom went down to the beach? What do you think she felt when they went to the beach and ate there chicken? What do you think she

R.W: You asked me too many questions about too many different things do I have to answer all of them

M.F: Yes you do!

R.W: Well than here goes! I think ~~they~~ they felt happy When they were eating chicken at the beach. Well time ran out I guess I don't have to answer all the questions anyway.

Figure 1A Written Conversation (Matthew and Russell)

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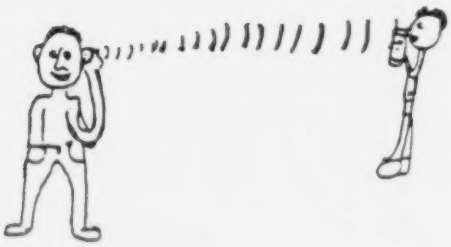
We listened to directions



October 3, 1988

I learned that Leigh's mom is concerned about Leigh.

Does Leigh's mom have a close friend?

I think the whole thing was educational and that we should do it again!

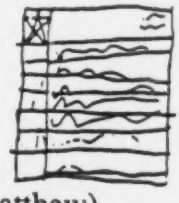


Figure 1B Reflection Notes (Matthew)

Matthew

DID

We did a silent dialog

LEARNED

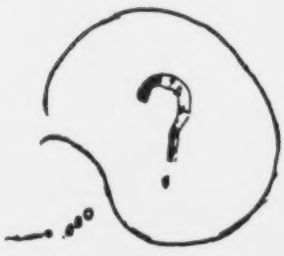
We learned to be silent longer.

1 C

Matthew

QUESTIONS

I know everything!



THOGHTS

I think it was great!

Figure 1C Reflection Notes (Russell)

Lisa
R
[redacted]
Maidie

Lisa: I ~~am~~ am sort of lonely at times because my dad got divorced from my mom

Maidie Does that give you a better understanding on what is happening in Leighs life? It helps me because the same thing that happend to you, happend to me

Lisa yes it does because we understand whats happening.

Maidie I agree. I think at the beggining she was sort mean and a person that you wouldn't want to be around all the time.

Lisa yes it does ~~bt~~ but then She changed and I'm hoping mine doesn't.

Maidie I hope my mom won't either. I am glad the story finally got her on the picture. I think she is real a nice person once you get to know her. I n the ending part of course.

Lisa Well yeah I guess your right and of course it was at the end

Figure 2 Written Conversation (Lisa and Maidie)

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The written conversations also generated ideas that likely had not surfaced during a reader's own reading. For example, several children raised questions of each other. Matthew asked Russell four questions; he had time to answer only one (see Figure 1A). Another partner group wrote about Mrs. Botts:

Jonathon: Why does she keep bugging him about Mr. Henshaw?

Bay: What do you mean she's bugging Leigh?

Jonathon: About Mr. Henshaw! Don't you pay any attention to the book!

Students also expressed differences of opinion with their partners. Although they did not pursue it further, Angela and Lindsay discovered that they held differing views about the closeness of the relationship between Leigh and his mother:

Angela: You know Leigh and his mother are not that close.
Lindsay: Are you sure they aren't? I thought they were pretty close.

In another conversation, Chrissy and Molly's views about life on welfare emerged:

Chrissy: I think that she is mean because she didn't fix the TV. Even if she doesn't have a lot of money, she should get it fixed.

Molly: Chrissy, would you rather have enough to eat or watch TV?

Chrissy: It is only two people on welfare. You can feed two people and get your TV fixed and still have some money left.

Molly: They don't have enough money as it is.

Variations in interpretation were spontaneous and natural in the conversational context. These variations, unlike prepackaged questions, guided students back to the text to justify or modify discrepant views. Through subsequent focused rereadings, Ms. Dakin could help the children discover how the author led them to conclusions. Through discussions, she could validate their prior knowledge as a basis for their personal versions of the story. The written conversation data provided Ms. Dakin many leads for future extension and critique.

Because written conversation acknowledges the social nature of language and its generativity, partner writing expands and deepens students' literary experience. It provides a structure through which students can explore their initial experience with literature. It gives the teacher unobtrusive access to students' developing insights and questions. Because written conversation is a face-to-face, albeit silent, dialogue, the purpose of writing and the impact of a specific audience is quickly realized by the children. Ideas not risked aloud often flow freely on paper. Written conversation allows for airing honest reactions and sharing concerns without whole class response. Because the focus is on content rather than form or correctness, thoughts find expression in an activity which feels safe. Written conversation allows students to work through their understanding of an aspect of literature and to consider their partner's alternative interpretations.

For young children and students of any age whose second language is English, written conversation demonstrates relationships between oral and written language. It shows reading and writing in process, as partners take turns making marks on paper that are intended to trigger meaning for the other person. The activity provides a social setting for writing with immediate response and emotional connections. It can be used to generate ideas for later discussion or further individual writing.

Teachers can use written conversation data for further planning - a prompt for making decisions about future literature study or additional instruction in language arts. When collected periodically, students' written conversations complement other writing samples as documentation of reading choices, growth in linguistic sophistication and style, and knowledge of language conventions.

Reflection Notes

The reflection notes invited children to think about their written conversations by writing and drawing about them. They were to respond briefly to each of four prompts: **What We Did, What I Learned, Questions I Have**, and **My General Reactions/Responses**. Just as in the written conversations, these papers demonstrated the individuality of children's understandings of Dear Mr. Henshaw and of the classroom tasks themselves.

The What We Did section showed the children's understanding of the instructions for the written conversation. About half of them wrote slight variations of "We did a silent dialogue," the teacher's terminology for written conversation (see Figure 3).

Some students elaborated on the process, thereby showing clearly that they understood it (see Figure 4).

In What I Learned, most of the children commented about story details. They also acknowledged that their peers held different views of the story from their own. Frequent references to story elements and events were made. Several children focused on what they had learned about Leigh's mother as a person:

Didem: I learned that Leigh's mother can be very loving.

Nicole: I learned how Leigh's mother felt towards the TV.

Other children acknowledged the variety of views held by classmates:

Dustin: I learned that Erik thinks Leigh's mom should get remarried.

Angela: I learned that everybody had pretty much different things and had a lot of background to what they said.

Jonathon: Not everyone thinks Ms. Botts is mean.

Several children devoted their What I Learned section to reflections on the *process* of the written conversation itself rather than the story:

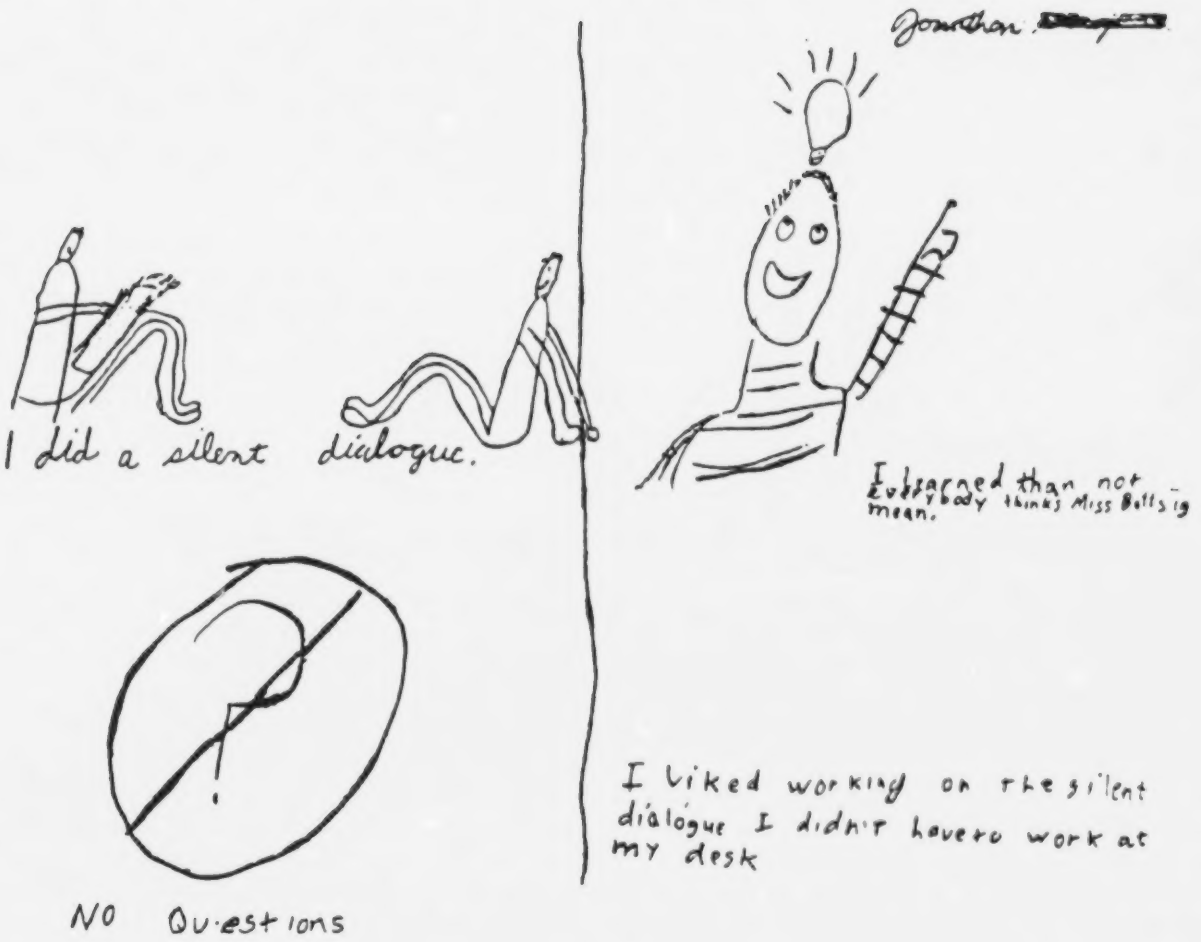


Figure 3 Reflection Notes (Jonathon)

Figure 4 Reflection Notes (Tate)

Matthew: I learned to be silent longer.

Jamie: Me and Tosh are a good pair, I think.

Antony: I learned it wasn't that fun because I'm a big mouth and I wanted to talk.

Students' comments occasionally acknowledged traditional school values as well as the children's developing ability to distance themselves from an activity and to reflect on it (see Figures 5 and 6). A few children acknowledged learning personal information about their partner (see Figure 7).

While the third section invited questions from the children, well over half of them submitted none, not a surprising response from self-assured fourth-graders (see Figure 8).

The questions that were raised referred primarily to the story plot:

Dustin: Why will the mommy not get married?

Erik: Why doesn't Leigh's mother get the TV fixed?

Sarah: Why do kids steal Leigh's lunches?

Russell: Does Leigh's mom have a close friend?

A few children addressed larger issues. Josh, for example, asked, "What kind of person is Leigh's mother?" Armondo noted, "I still want to know more."

Other students posed questions that went beyond plot. Vanessa wondered about the faithfulness to the text in her partner's comments (see Figure 9). Jenny, her partner, seemed more concerned with Vanessa's use of language conventions than story line (see Figure 6).

In the final section of the reflection notes, Responses and Reactions, children were asked to think more generally about the entire literature study experience and to write and show their overall impression of the session. Most stated that they liked doing the written conversations. Several asked to do it again. Others were more specific:

Angela: I thought it was very fun and enjoyable.

Russell: The whole thing was educational, and we should do it again.

Lindsay: Doing this really gave me a better idea of what the mother was like.

One boy expressed both enjoyment of the experience and anxiety about the optional sharing (which he did not do) which followed the partner writing (see Figure 10).

Figure 5 Reflection Notes (Lindsay)

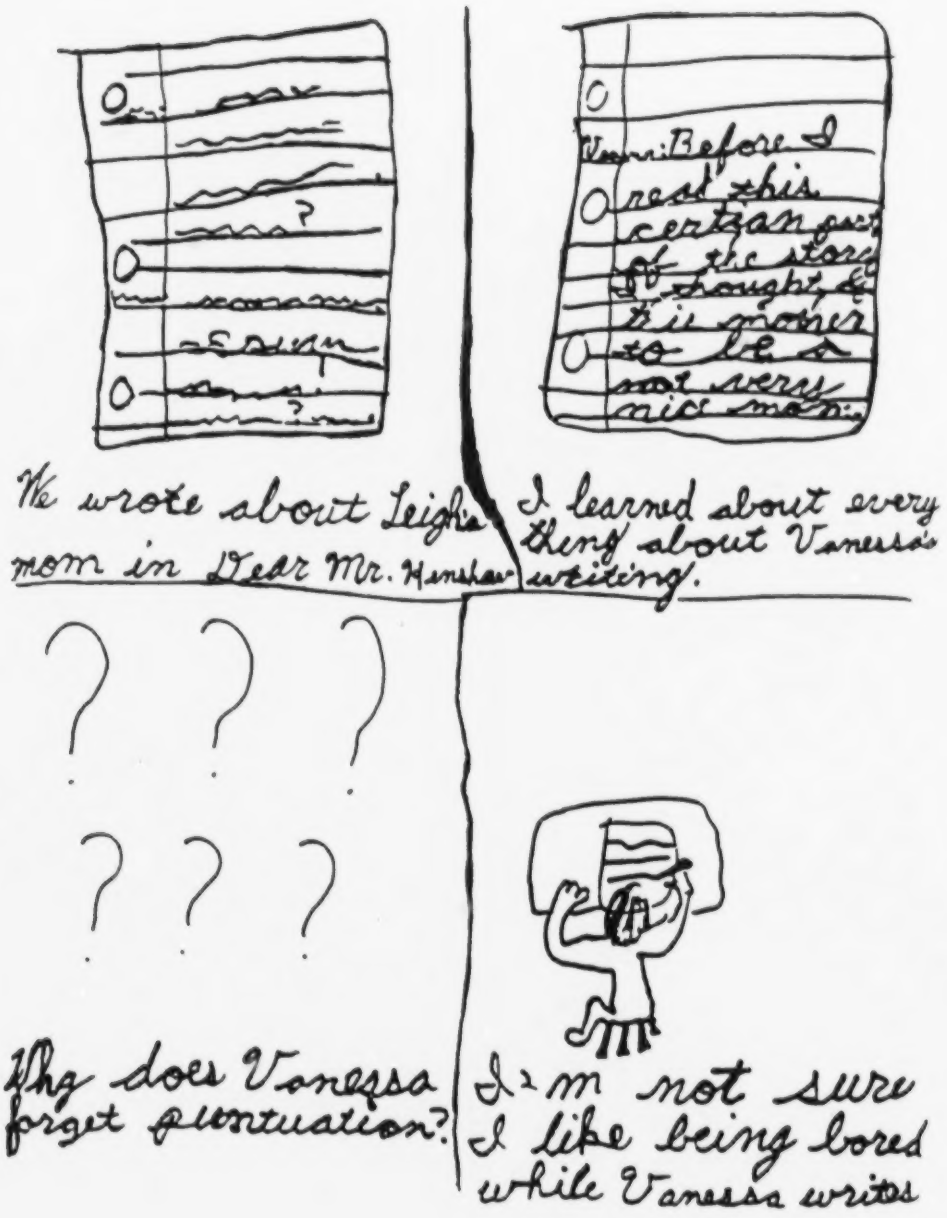


Figure 6 Reflection Notes (Jenny)

Did

wrote a silent dialog.

Learned

LISA

I learned that maidies dad ~~left~~ left her too.

Questions

how old is Leighs mother?

Thought respance

I thought maidies was interesting.

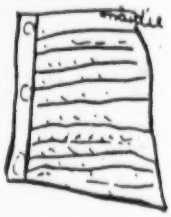
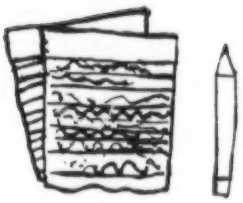


Figure 7 Reflection Notes (Lisa)

Antony [redacted]



We did silent dialogue. I learned it wasn't that fun because I'm a big mouth and I wanted to talk.

I don't have any questions.

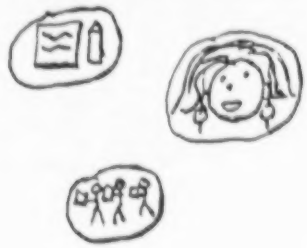
I think that if we ever do it again we should be talking

Figure 8 Reflection Notes (Antony)

Figure 9 Reflection Notes (Vanessa)

DID

WE DID A SILENT
DIALOG ON LEIGH'S MOTHER



LEARN

I LEARNED THAT THE MOTHER
WAS really a nice person.

questions?

I still don't know why
Leighs mother doesn't get the TV.
FIXED

WHAT YOU ~~DID~~ THOUGHT

I thought everything was
FUN but I was nervous because I
didn't want to go up in front of the class

Erik

Figure 10 Reflection Notes (Erik)

On the whole, the children clearly expressed their views of the written conversation experience in their reflection notes. Their references to the text showed attention to literary elements and issues. Active involvement with the story was illustrated in drawings and comments. Many children demonstrated an awareness of the social and psycholinguistic dimensions of the written conversation experience.

The reflection notes suggest instructional possibilities just as did the written conversations. Future class discussions and small group activities could be planned to expand and clarify students' understanding of the story. Close readings and issue-focused dialogues could be scheduled. Students might use the reflection notes as prompts for more writing. Teachers might pair students in different combinations for further partner work and in other ways modify the classroom social climate. They might also use the reflection notes to encourage self-evaluation of other classroom experiences.

Classroom Context

Ms. Dakin's classroom provided a context for extension and elaboration of an aesthetic experience with a literary text. The generative and recursive nature of language was apparent in all of Ms. Dakin's activities. Language - both oral and written - permeated the setting, and invitations to use language were varied and carefully orchestrated. During the hour-and-a-half period, time was available for reading to self, to small groups, and to the whole class. Children were involved in writing with a partner and individually. They talked in groups of four and most of them contributed to whole group discussion; they listened in large and small groups to classmates and to the teacher.

Nearly all of the classroom language was directed toward the children's literary experiences and their responses to the story. Children were asked if and how the characters related to their own experiences. They were reminded by peers as well as the teacher to check the text when incongruities between interpretations appeared, to see what in the text made them think that way. Although sustained reading of the novel was not a part of this day's plan, the children had obviously read the text to themselves and were aware of the story as a whole, not simply as a series of segments and assignments.

Teaching and Learning Literature: Becoming an Explorer

Recently, teacher groups have become more political and vocal in their efforts to foster authority and responsibility for both teachers and learners. They have insisted on participation in curriculum and evaluation decisions because they know that their first-hand knowledge of their students must take precedence over external curricular mandates when the two realities conflict. They have worked to restore their role in decision-making and to extend professional options and prerogatives in the schooling hierarchy.

The proposed metaphor of teacher as explorer fits into this professional movement. As the leader of an expedition into territory both known and unknown, the teacher sets the course and decides on means and methods for moving ahead. In the teaching of literature, the teacher selects and develops curricular goals in literature, based on responsible assessment of the conditions, resources, and constraints in the educational environment, and on knowledge of

students' characteristics. Once the expedition has commenced, the teacher bears the responsibility to adjust the direction and timing of daily events and to use resources based on the actual conditions faced by the group. In this role, the teacher of literature makes decisions about specific texts for exploration, organizes the classroom environment to foster and expand lived-through experiences of the literary texts, documents on a regular and frequent schedule both group and individual progress (as well as detours), provides encouragement and support to all, and offers specific assistance to those who need it.

To initiate and maintain this philosophical change from the role of curriculum clerk to that of educational explorer, teachers will need to involve themselves in several tasks: selecting texts, organizing the classroom for lived-through experiences, documenting student progress, and expanding their own professional knowledge.

Selecting Texts

One of the first changes made by "explorer" teachers in teaching literature is to provide students with authentic whole texts rather than abbreviated, mutilated, or contrived ones. They place their pedagogical emphasis on lived-through experiences with literature and language use in context, rather than language and comprehension exercises with a text controlled to teach specific skills. In this atmosphere, students are trusted to handle increasingly difficult linguistic structures and a variety of genres. With real texts (both literary and others), teachers encourage students to apply their linguistic and experiential strengths as they make sense of their reading. When students encounter or select texts that are inappropriate because of complex linguistic structures and dense or unfamiliar conceptual content, teacher explorers assist them over the new literary terrain by using a variety of supportive instructional strategies. Occasionally, they may even encourage deferment of a particular text in favor of another more accessible one - thereby providing a temporary detour or an alternate route which keeps them with the expedition.

Teachers as explorers do not assign texts designed to teach skills nor do they create situations in which students need to exclude aspects of themselves from meaning-making with the texts they encounter. Rather, students read and learn to read selections which expand their worlds by acknowledging and building upon their present understandings and attitudes. Through work with peers and teachers, they discover elements in the texts that extend beyond the particular book to larger contexts and issues of significance. Teachers highlight connections among different titles and help students make explicit linkages with previous readings. Teachers make available a wide spectrum of texts and encourage students to make frequent choices about their own reading. The "Mine, Yours, and Ours" notion (Goodman and Watson, 1977) structures teacher input for ongoing student reading and conferencing. In this way students read concurrently at least three titles: one they themselves choose, the second selected by the teacher (perhaps a text in common with other classmates - a core text such as Dear Mr. Henshaw), and a third text they agree on together, one which might extend classroom themes or earlier reading.

Organizing the Classroom for Lived-Through Experiences

Ms. Dakin's classroom, presented earlier, provides *one* view of a classroom atmosphere and organization supported by the metaphor of teacher as explorer. All of the students were included in the exploration of Dear Mr. Henshaw; no one was tracked out. This use of one text as a core selection meant an intensive study of a book in common, one of several selections throughout the school year. Designating a common title did not mean limiting the entire class to an easy book. Rather, for each core text, many opportunities for entering the text world were afforded to all students over an extended period of time. Ms. Dakin's students, for example, were engaged with Dear Mr. Henshaw for approximately six weeks. The explicit and overriding focus on collaborative meaning-making, together with the inclusion of all students in the exploration, substantially differentiates between classrooms devoted to the experience and study of literature through which students become more effective readers and those which use literary selections for conventional reading instruction, emphasizing skill acquisition and comprehension exercises.

Ms. Dakin's classroom focus was teaching literature, not teaching reading skills by using literature. Because she knew that language is learned through use in authentic and engaging situations, she was confident that her students were becoming more proficient readers as they read, wrote about and discussed the story world of Dear Mr. Henshaw. Ms. Dakin believed that students learn to read in the process of reading literature and hearing it read aloud, but her purpose for using literature was to foster a literary experience, not to provide practice on selected subskills.

She also acknowledged that she was teaching, implicitly, conventions of written language. For example, although the students were not overly concerned about correctness in their written conversations, they did have to make sure that their messages were understandable to their partners. They were faced with immediate reasons for using familiar spelling patterns; unconventional spellings were of concern only when communication was interrupted. In her role as explorer, Ms. Dakin used expressive writing as a source of information about her students' use of language conventions just as a trekker uses information found along the route as guides for planning and possible rethinking of the route. In both cases, the relevance of the information and urgency for action are evaluated with respect to larger goals and knowledge of individual participants.

All children were expected to participate fully and contribute actively, with the assumption that each would experience the text in a personal and significant way. As in any life situation, different personal histories foster individual understandings of the story, and individual strengths and interests compel participants to pursue different paths. Ms. Dakin planned instructional tasks which assumed and valued different student abilities, strengths, interests, and outcomes; in fact, she viewed the variety of student experiences evolving from study of the core work as highly desirable. Each student's unique reading of the text contributed and enlarged the meaning potential for all classroom participants. The frequent use of informal writing for the purpose of stimulating thinking and communication exemplified the value she placed on the exploration of ideas.

Organizing classrooms where students feel comfortable to evoke and explore responses to literature requires a shift in notions about curriculum development. In such settings, teachers draw on their own responses to a text and their knowledge of the larger context of literature

and language learning, as well as information they gain from careful ongoing observation of students' responses to the selection and to other planned classroom experiences. The locus of control shifts as teachers take responsibility for using student response and class interaction as primary sources of curriculum planning. Published teacher's editions (for basal anthologies) and other source books take their place as references rather than directives. No single or external source is assumed to "contain" the essential elements of an ideal literature curriculum. Such a view requires trust and professional commitment from teachers and support beyond the classroom. It is, however, an exciting and legitimate curriculum alternative which embodies the "teacher as explorer" metaphor.

Documenting Student Progress

Teachers who view their role as explorers change their purposes and procedures for documenting and evaluating student growth. Teachers become astute "kid watchers." (Goodman, 1978) Because they recognize the social nature of learning, they audio- and videotape group sessions for analysis and evaluation. Because they expect diverse, personal interpretations to arise from their students' readings, they seek measures which capture individual responses to literature without distorting them. Because they value the aesthetic experience literature can provide, they encourage alternate modes of response. Because they acknowledge that reading and writing are processes and not sets of skills, they employ techniques which keep language whole and purposeful. They use student products to inform their curriculum development, to assess student strengths and interests, to evaluate their teaching effectiveness, and to demonstrate to students and others the nature of growth in language and literature.

As explorers, teachers search for evaluative evidence that emerges from classroom projects, daily routines and uninterrupted samples of reading and writing, rather than from contrived assessments and formal tests. Student work is chosen by students and teachers and collected over time to chronicle tasks and provide samples of current competence. Folders containing works-in-progress, first drafts, sketches, notes about potential projects, peer responses, photographs of projects, and out-takes from completed tasks provide other cues to student strengths and interests. Completed work is shared with peers and often published outside the classroom. Projects frequently are displayed around the school as well as in community settings and public agencies.

In addition to samples of student work, these teachers keep brief informal written records about students' individual work patterns and their involvement in classroom activities. These classroom observations provide anecdotal records which, over time, add perspective as teachers periodically decide on the letter grades most schools require to summarize and report student progress. To augment the single-letter quantitative assessment, copies of representative student work are included to illustrate the quality of learning.

Expanding Professional Knowledge

Leading students on successful expeditions into literature requires pedagogical and literary knowledge as well as the sense of confidence that accompanies such knowledge. Teachers who adopt the explorer role recognize the power of classroom observations (i.e., kid

watching) as one important source of their competence. However, many desire additional support as they reconsider and reconstruct life in their classrooms. These teachers need to know current research and theory about literacy learning and evaluation, and to be readers of literature themselves. They need to know experientially the power of writing as a way to make meaning. They need access to available cross-cultural literature. They need to develop criteria for selecting texts both for and with their students. In order to move toward a meaning-centered, literature-based curriculum, teachers need to engage in ongoing professional development (Barr, 1988).

Teachers of literature must *experience* the power of strategies which reflect the principles of literacy development and reader response theory. In order to realize (or to be reminded of) the power of literature, they must *read* artful texts which inspire and captivate them. While working through their new understandings, they need to confer with other teachers already using meaning-centered literature study and to *observe* their classrooms. They must *try* the new ideas and strategies in their own classrooms and *reflect* on their students' as well as their own reactions to the changes. Knowing that revision is as vital in teaching as in composing, they must take risks and *accept* themselves as learners as well as teachers.

Finally, in order to change the metaphor for teaching literature, teachers who wish to lead their students into explorations of text worlds need time and support. Designing new literature curricula, revaluing student work, reading unfamiliar trade books, consulting professional references, and discussing plans and results with peers and experts are time-consuming tasks. Rather than hurriedly instituting across-the-board changes, comfortable adjustments to existing teaching patterns are recommended, even when they seem minor. As confidence in an evolving philosophy and changing teacher role grows, theoretically consistent activities will begin to occur intuitively. "Good" activities will crowd out less productive tasks. Reflection on the new practices provides critical guidance, especially as it is shared with colleagues.

In addition to support from peers, teachers moving toward the explorer role need clear sanction from administrators. When teachers are trusted with the content and pacing of changes in their classrooms, they take responsibility for the results. Administrators can create a supportive context which enables teachers to "own" the philosophy they are implementing. Assurances that success will be based on more than conventional measures of student growth, such as standardized test scores, contribute to teachers' willingness to try new ideas. Deferment of external judgments during early months of implementation builds further confidence. Administrators who take time for conversations with teachers about their curriculum changes provide important opportunities for the growth of mutual respect and professional commitment.

Summary

The notion of teacher as explorer, although not new, is not yet a dominant metaphor for the teaching of literature. Evidence from classrooms and implications of current research and theory suggest the metaphor is strong and apt. Teachers can be explorers who lead students beyond themselves into text worlds. It is only when literature provides a context for exploration that the aesthetic experience described by Rosenblatt (1983) a half century ago occurs: as teachers lead students "toward a fuller participation in what the text offers" (p. 78), they enable the readers to "participate in another's vision - to reap knowledge of the world, to fathom the

resources of the human spirit, to gain insights that will make their own lives more comprehensible" (p. 7).

Exploring literature requires revision of prevalent beliefs about the teaching and learning of literature and of literacy. It calls upon different traditions of research and theory. It demands the replacement of methods and materials commonly assumed to be necessary to teach literature and reading. It requires thoughtful and responsible planning and active decision-making as students progress into, through, and beyond the author's world. In the same manner that teachers become expedition leaders, students become explorers. As student responses are validated and extended, their sophistication with language and literature grows, and the journey into literature becomes an exploration of life itself.

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